



How Extension Faculty Can Help Reduce Disaster-Related Stress



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First of all, extension professionals can help their communities by listening to the people in their communities and by being trained to recognize signs of negative stress.

If negative stress is left unmanaged, the risk for stress-related health problems, interpersonal conflicts, a reduction in job performance and even the threat of domestic violence, becomes more likely. To counter this, we must first recognize negative stress, and then suggest positive ways for individuals in our communities to deal with it. Some warning signs include: persistent fatigue, inability to concentrate, flashes of anger, changes in eating/sleeping habits, increased use of alcohol/tobacco, prolonged headaches, backaches, stomachaches, and depression, anxiety or helplessness.

What can you do to help people struggling with negative stress? You can organize mailouts of parenting tips and organize support groups for parents and play groups for children. After a disaster, teachers might appreciate some help dealing with the many children affected by a disaster. You can build coalitions and work with community agencies to help your community deal with emotional recovery from the disaster.

Letter of Outreach

On the following page is an example of a letter used by the Missouri Cooperative Extension Service to initiate dialogue about disaster recovery.

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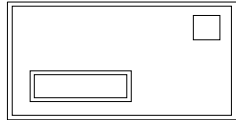
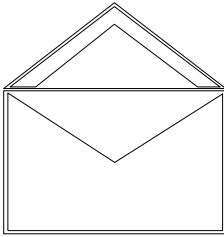
Adapted by UF/IFAS from:
Stress and Coping With Disaster: A Handbook Compiled Following the Midwest Flood of 1993 for Extension Professionals,
compiled by Marty Baker and Ami O'Neill

Letter of Outreach

[Extension Service official letterhead]

Date _____

Dear _____,



The devastating rains and floods are history for many midwest residents. However, for those of us who suffered damage or losses during the disaster, the Flood of '93 may still be a very real presence. The difficulties of repairing property and roads, coping with financial pressures, and prolonged stress can affect marriages, family life, and one's sense of well-being. Memories of frightening experiences and sadness for what was lost can make it hard to "return to normal." Children may find it especially difficult to talk about their experiences and fears.

Any loss takes its toll on our emotional reserves as well as our physical and economic resources. These problems and feelings can last for many months and having someone to talk with can be very helpful.

Since the threat of future flooding is of great concern for many people, Human Development Extension would like to offer support in as many ways as possible. We have field specialists in nearly every county in Missouri that can provide materials pertaining to stress and other concerns about flooding and related disasters.

If we can be of further service to you or your family, please feel free to call your local extension specialist or call the Missouri State Extension Office in Columbia at (314) 882-4657. Please feel free to share this letter with any friends, neighbors, or others.

Sincerely,
